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Homoharringtonine and Low-Dose Cytarabine in the Management of Late Chronic-Phase Chronic Myelogenous Leukemia

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ABSTRACT

PURPOSE: : To evaluate the efficacy andtoxicity profiles of a combination regimen of homoharringtonine (HHT)and low-dose cytarabine (ara-C) in patients with Philadelphiachromosome (Ph)—positive chronic myelogenous leukemia (CML) whohad experienced treatment failure with interferon alfa (IFN α)therapy.

PATIENTS AND METHODS: One hundred five patients were

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treated: 100 in chronicphase (15 with cytogenetic clonal evolution) and five in acceleratedphase. Their median age was 52 years; all had been treatedunsuccessfully with IFN α ; 94% were in late chronic phase; 43% hadbeen exposed to ara-C and 11% had been exposed to HHT. Patientsreceived HHT 2.5 mg/m² by continuousinfusion daily for 5 days and ara-C 15mg/m² daily in two subcutaneous injectionsfor 5 days every 4 weeks. The outcome of the 100 patients in chronicphase was compared with

a previous study group of 73 patients treatedwith HHT alone.

RESULTS: Overall, the complete hematologic response (CHR) rate in chronic phasewas 72%; the cytogenetic response rate was 32% (major response, 15%; complete response, 5%). Toxicities were acceptable, mostly related tomoderate diarrhea (3%), headaches (3%), cardiovascular events (3%), and myelosuppression-associated complications (3% to 14%). With amedian follow-up period of 25 months, the estimated 4-year survivalrate was 55%. Response rates were identical with HHT plus ara-C versusHHT alone, but the survival was significantly longer with thecombination after accounting for differences in the study groups andby multivariate analysis.

CONCLUSION: The combination regimen of HHT and ara-C is effective andsafe in patients with CML who have experienced treatment failure with IFN α and needs to be investigated together with IFN α as partof front-line CML therapy. The addition of ara-C did not improve theresponse rates but may have improved survival, perhaps throughsuppression of clones related to diseasetransformation.

INTRODUCTION

SURVIVAL IN Philadelphia chromosome (Ph)–positivechronic myelogenous leukemia (CML) has improved with interferon alfa (IFN α) therapy and allogeneic stem-cell transplantation(SCT). ¹⁻⁴ With IFN α regimens, the median survival is6 to 7 years. Prognosis is associated with patient riskgroup, ^{5,6} doseschedules of IFN α , combined therapies (eg, with low-dosecytarabine [ara-C]), ⁷⁻⁹ and the achievement and degree ofPh-suppression (cytogenetic

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response). By multivariate and landmarkanalyses, achievement of cytogenetic and major cytogenetic responses(Ph-positive metaphases < 35%) have been associated independentlywith survival prolongation. $^{8-12}$

Improving on the state and duration of minimal diseaseburden (complete hematologic or cytogenetic response) in CML, as inother cancers, has become the target of many investigational strategies and a surrogate end point for long-termsurvival. Discovering agents or modalities that may suppress Phpositive cells is thus actively pursued. Patients who fail IFN α regimens and who are not eligible for allogeneic SCT have the option of receiving hydroxyurea therapy or undergoing investigational approaches such as autologous SCT or new agents.

Homoharringtonine (HHT), a plant alkaloid, was firstinvestigated in China and reported to be active in leukemias. ^{13,14} Phase I and II studiesin the United States confirmed its antileukemic activity butdocumented a high incidence of cardiovascular complications withshort-infusion schedules ^{15,16} and with higher-dose continuous-infusionschedules (30% incidence of hypotension and arrhythmias). ¹⁷ However, definite activity wasobserved in acute myelogenous leukemia (AML), acute promyelocyticleukemia (APL), and myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS). ¹⁷⁻²⁰ We hadinvestigated a lower-dose, longer-duration, continuous-infusionschedule of HHT (2.5 mg/m² daily for 10 to14 days instead of 5 to 9 mg/m² daily for 5to 7 days). This schedule abrogated the occurrence of cardiovascularcomplications including hypotensive events and arrhythmias, whichoccurred in less than 5% of patients with the new schedule. ²⁰ This observation, together with thenoted antiproliferative effect of HHT, resulted in further studies ofthe new schedule in CML, an indolent disease that requires a safeschedule for long-term therapy. We subsequently reported on theefficacy of HHT alone in patients

with late chronic-phase CML(duration of disease more than 12 months), many of whom wereIFN α -resistant, and in sequence with IFN α in earlychronic-phase CML. ^{21,22} In both studies, significant anti-CMLefficacy was observed.

ara-C has shown activity in CML as a single agent and incombination with IFN α . ²³⁻²⁵ The mechanisms underlying the anti-CMLefficacy of HHT are unknown but may be mediated through an effect onthe apoptosis pathways. ^{26,27} HHT had also been reported to besynergistic with IFN α and with ara-C in preclinicalmodels. ²⁷ The limitedtherapeutic options of patients with late chronic-phase CML whoexperience treatment failure with IFN α therapy and who are notcandidates for allogeneic SCT and the efficacy of both HHT and ara-Cin vitro²⁶⁻²⁸ and in vivo²¹⁻²⁵ led to thecurrent investigation of HHT and low-dose ara-C combination inpatients who have failed IFN α regimens. The results are summarizedin thisstudy.

PATIENTSAND METHODS

Study Group

Adults with a diagnosis of Ph-positive CML were enteredonto the study after informed consent was obtained. Eligibilitycriteria were as follows: (1) age 15 years or older, (2) chronic- oraccelerated-phase CML disease, ²⁹ (3) good performance status (Zubrod0 to 2), (4) treatment failure on an IFN α -containing regimen, (5)normal renal (creatinine < 2 mg/dL) and hepatic functions(bilirubin < 2 mg/dL), and (6) no evidence of severe cardiacdisease (class III or IV).

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Treatment failure of IFN α -containing regimens wasdefined in one of three categories: (1) hematologic resistancereferred to failure to achieve at least a partial hematologic response (PHR) after 3 months or more of therapy, failure to achieve a completehematologic response (CHR) after 6 months or more of therapy, or lossof hematologic response after achieving CHR, with an increasing WBCcount greater than $12 \times 10^9/L$ onoptimal IFN α therapy documented for at least 4 weeks; (2)cytogenetic resistance referred to failure to obtain a cytogeneticresponse (Ph-positive cells \geq 90%) after 12 months or more oftherapy, or loss of cytogenetic response with return of Ph-positivecells to greater than 90%; and (3) severe grade 3 or 4 unacceptabletoxicity related to IFN α therapy. For hematologic or cytogenetic resistance, patients were required to have received IFN α at 5million U/m² daily or the maximum-tolerateddose. The median IFN α dose delivery in our studies was 5 millionU/m² daily with IFN α alone and morethan 3 million U/m² daily with IFN α combinations. In the category of failure because of unacceptableIFN α -associated toxicity, no minimum dose or duration of therapywas specified, because some of these toxicities may not bedose-related and are life-threatening (eg, immune-mediatedthrombocytopenia, immune-mediated hemolysis, neurotoxicity, severedepression, cardiomyopathy, pulmonary failure, and so on).

Patients in blastic phase were not eligible (marrow orperipheral blasts \geq 30%). Patients with cytogenetic clonalevolution as their only accelerated-phase feature were included in thechronic-phase analysis on the basis of their more favorable prognosisfrom previous analyses. ^{30,31} Late chronic phase of CML was defined astime from diagnosis to start of therapy of more than 12months. ^{1,2,6,9,25}

Characteristics of the study group are listed in Table 1. Their median age was 52 years; 49% were females. All patients had previously received IFN α therapy; 54% were referred from outside thein their having experienced treatment failure with IFN α . IFN α treatment failure was attributed to

hematologic resistance(42 patients), lack of cytogenetic response after 12 months or more of IFN α (25 patients), severe unacceptable toxicity with IFN α (18patients), resistance plus toxicity (16 patients), or other reasons(four patients). All 25 patients entered for lack of cytogenetic response had IFN α therapy discontinued and had evidence of activeCML disease (leukocytosis, thrombocytosis) at the time of initiation of HHT and ara-C therapy. Only six patients received therapy with aCML chronic-phase duration of less than 12 months: five had IFN α therapy discontinued because of severe toxicities (two of them with resistance) and one because of hematologic resistance. Elevenpatients had previously received HHT on the front-line sequential HHTfollowed by IFN α maintenance (DM91-13)²²; 45 patients had previously received ara-C with IFN α .

View this table: Table 1. Characteristics of the Study Group (105 patients) [in this window] [in a new window]

All 105 patients had 95% to 100% Ph-positive metaphases atthe start of HHT and ara-C therapy. One hundred patients were inchronic phase, 15 of whom had cytogenetic clonal evolution. Thisincluded trisomy 8 (two patients), double Philadelphia (one patient),isochromosome 17 (one patient), and other abnormalities (11patients). Five patients had accelerated phase CML (basophilia \geq 20%, two patients; blasts \geq 15%, one patient; thrombocytopenia <100 x 10 9 /L, twopatients).

Therapy

HHT was given at a dose of 2.5mg/m^2 by continuous infusion daily for 5days (days 1 to 5) together with ara-C 15mg/m^2 daily in two equal subcutaneous doses12 hours apart for 5 days (days 1 to 5). HHT was given either througha central-line catheter or through a peripheral-line catheter replacedevery 2 to 3 days. Therapy was repeated every 4 weeks. HHT and ara-Ctherapy was modified to achieve with each course a lowest granulocytecount of approximately 10^9 /L, with aplatelet count greater than 50×10^9 /L. For this purpose, the modifications in therapy were in the duration of treatment, ie, in the number ofdays of treatment (± 1 day), rather than in the daily dose of HHT or ara-C. For example, a patient who had achieved a lowestgranulocyte count greater than 2 $\times 10^9$ /L and lowest platelet count greaterthan 100×10^9 /L on a course of HHT and ara-C given for n days will receive the next course of HHT andara-C for (n·+1) days. In contrast, a patient who had achieved alowest granulocyte count of less than 10^9 /Lor a lowest platelet count of less than 50×10^9 /L on a course given for n days willreceive the next course of HHT and ara-C for (n - 1)days.

Therapy was discontinued for the following reasons: (1)evidence of resistance with the optimal acceptable dose schedule, (2)disease transformation, (3) unacceptable toxicity (grade 3 to 4) afterdose reductions were made, (4) availability of other better options(eg, allogeneic SCT), or (5) patient or physician choice (eg, in thecase of a lack of cytogenetic response after 12 months of therapy). Iftoxicity was due to a particular agent (eg, hypotension or headachewith HHT), then the daily dose in subsequent courses was reduced by25% for grade 2 persistent toxicity and by 50% for grade 3 to 4toxicities. Toxicity was graded according to the National CancerInstitute common toxicity criteria. 32

Criteriaand Statistical Considerations

Response criteria were as previously described. 2,6 A CHR required a WBC countof less than $10 \times 10^9/L$ without peripheral immature cells (blasts, promyelocytes, myelocytes), aplatelet count of $450 \times 10^9/L$ or less, and disappearance of signs and symptoms of disease, including palpable splenomegaly. CHR was further classified by cytogenetic response based on best suppression of Ph-positive cells as

follows:complete, Ph-positive 0%; partial, Ph-positive 1% to 34%; and minor, Ph-positive 35% to 90%. A major cytogenetic response included completeand partial cytogenetic responses (Ph-positive < 35%). A PHR wasdefined as for CHR, but with persistence of peripheral immature cellsand/or splenomegaly or thrombocytosis (but 50% or less ofpretreatment).

Results of X^2 tests are presented as an indication of association of pretreatment characteristics with cytogenetic response outcomes. Survival estimates were based on the method of Kaplan and Meier³³ and compared using the log-ranktest. ³⁴ For purposes of comparing results of this trial to those obtained on the trial that immediately preceded it, ²¹ patients were classified into risk groups on the basis of acombination of four factors (age, performance status, interval from CML diagnosis to treatment, and percentage of peripheral basophils) previously reported as determinants of prognosis in late chronic-phase CML. ³⁵

RESULTS

Chronic-PhaseCML

One hundred patients had chronic-phase CML; 15 of them hadevidence of clonal evolution. All had evidence of active CML diseaseat the start of therapy (patients entered on therapy because ofcytogenetic resistance had IFN α therapy discontinued and wereexhibiting WBC or platelet count increases by the time HHT and ara-Ctherapy was started).

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Among 85 patients with active chronic-phase disease butwithout clonal evolution, 61 (72%) achieved CHR, and 11 (13%) hadPHR. Cytogenetic response was noted in 26 patients (31%): major in 12(14%) and complete in four (5%) (Table 2).

View this table: Table 2. Response to Therapy in 105 Patients Treated [in this window] [in a new window]

Among 15 patients with evidence of clonal evolution, 11(73%) achieved CHR, three (20%) achieved a PHR, and one failed toachieve a response. A cytogenetic response was observed in six of the11 patients who had achieved CHR (55%; 40% of total); response wascomplete in one, partial in two, and minor in three patients. Clonalevolution disappeared in the patient achieving complete cytogeneticresponse and in two of three patients who had a minor cytogeneticresponse. One of the five patients who had CHR without Ph suppressionalso had complete suppression of the clonalevolution.

Accelerated-PhaseCML

Among five patients treated in accelerated-phase CML, three (60%) obtained CHR. One such patient achieved a completecytogenetic response.

SideEffects

Nonhematologic. Side effects of HHT and ara-C combination are listed inTable 3. Themost common side effects were diarrhea and headache during therapy, mostly attributable to HHT. They were rarely severe (two patients; 2%). Other side effects such as skin rashes, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and aches

were unusual. Of note, hypotension and arrhythmiaswere observed in only 4% of patients.

View this table: Table 3. Side Effects [in this window] [in a new window]

Hematologic. With induction therapy, the incidence of granulocytopenialess than 0.5×10^9 /L was 13% and theincidence of thrombocytopenia less than 30×10^9 /L was 4%. Significant anemia withhemoglobin less than 9.0 g/dL occurred in14% during induction and in50% of patients (14% of courses) during maintenancetherapy.

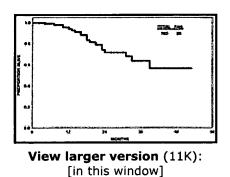
Prognosis byPretreatment Characteristics

Responses in chronic phase by different pretreatmentcharacteristics are listed in Table 4. No significant associations were found between cytogenetic response and knownprognostic features. There were no differences in response by duration of chronic-phase disease or by prior exposure to ara-C. Survival wassignificantly worse among older patients. A trend for worse survivalwas also observed with thrombocytosis, increased marrow blasts, and longer duration of chronic phase (Table 4).

View this table: Table 4. Outcome Within Subsets Based on Pretreatment Characteristics [in this window] [in a new window]

Follow-UpResults

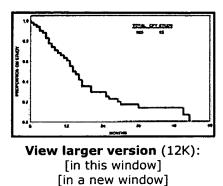
The median number of HHT and ara-C courses was nine(range, one to 50 courses). The total number of courses received sofar was 1,071. With a median follow-up time of 25 months, 18 deathshave occurred, at times ranging from 5 to 39 months after the start oftherapy. The estimated survival rates at 2 and 4 years were 77% and55%, respectively (Fig1). The median time on therapy was 10 months(Fig 2). Atlast follow-up, 41 patients continued on therapy, and 64 were removedfrom study for reasons listed in Table 5.



[in a new window]

Fig1. Overall survival from start of

Fig2. Time on



View this table: Table 5. Patient Status (N = 105 Patients) [in this window]

[in a new window]

The course of patients who achieved a major cytogenetic response is listed in Table6. At the time of last follow-up, seven of the 16patients with cytogenetic response (44%) continued to have acytogenetic response: two were still in CHR on therapy, threedeveloped hematologic resistance, and four were removed from studybecause of toxicity (two patients), patient request (one patient), and catheter-related problems (one patient). Two of 16 cytogenetic responders died (one after allogeneic transplantation) compared with 18 of 89 patients without a cytogenetic response.

View this table: Table 6. Follow-Up of Patients With Major Cytogenetic Response [in this window] [in a new window]

Comparison of HHT Plus Ara-C to Previous HHT alone

To evaluate the possible impact on survival of addingara-C to HHT, we compared the results of the 100 patients in chronicphase for this trial with the previous trial of HHT alone, whichaccrued 73 patients with late chronic-phase CML. That trial wasconducted starting in 1989 and had identical eligibility requirements to the HHT plus ara-C trial, except that there was no prior exposure to HHT or ara-C (not available then) and prior IFN α treatmentfailure was not required. Compared with the 100 patients in chronicphase receiving HHT plus ara-C, the patients treated with HHT alonewere younger (P = .07), but had a higher incidence of splenomegaly (P = .06) and leukocytosis(P = .002) and a higherincidence of peripheral blasts (P = .001) and clonal evolution(P = .03)(Table 7).

View this table: Table 7. Comparison of HHT Versus HHT Plus Ara-C Study Group [in this window] [in a new window]

Although there were differences in distributions ofpatient characteristics between the two trials (Table 7), a categorization ofpatients into risk groups based on four factors previously identified important for prognosis in late chronic-phase CML³⁵ suggested that patients on the twostudies had similar overall

prognosis. A slightly higher proportion of patients receiving HHT alone fell in the lowest risk group, having none of the unfavorable factors (age \ge 60 years, time from diagnosis to treatment \ge 3 years, performance status of \ge 1, or peripheral-blood basophils \ge 7%). Response rates were nearly identical on the two trials (Table 7), but early results suggested that survival was somewhat prolonged for patients treated with HHT plus ara-C (Fig3; P= .04 [test stratified by risk group]). Similar results were obtained with stratification by age and platelets (P = .03).

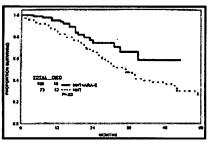


Fig3. Survival with HHT with or without

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We also analyzed all 173 patients in a multivariate analysis to investigate possible associations of pretreatment characteristics with survival, and we included therapy (HHT v HHT plus ara-C) as a prognostic variable. The multivariate analysis selected older age (P = .01), splenomegaly (P < .01), and thrombocytosis(P = .02) as independent poor significant factors, but therapy remained an important prognostic factor (P = .026) favoring the addition of ara-C.

DISCUSSION

The combination of HHT and ara-C in patients who hadexperienced treatment failure with IFN α yielded encouragingresults. Among patients treated in chronic phase, 72% achieved CHR;31% achieved a cytogenetic response, which was majorin14%. Considering that the study group included mostlyIFN α -resistant patients in late chronic phase who had fewtherapeutic options available, the median duration of disease controlof 10 months and

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estimated 4-year survival rate of 55% werefavorable. Our results suggest that HHT-based regimens may beeffective therapies for patients for whom IFN α therapy wasunsuccessful and who are not candidates for allogeneic SCT. They also indicate a potential role of HHT and ara-C as part of front-line CMLtherapy to improve the degree and duration of cytogenetic response and the prognosis of patients with CML. Considering the acceptable toxicity profile of the regimen, such investigational strategies may be appropriate.

Comparable or even better results have also been reported by Ernst et al, 36 who usedHHT 2.5 mg/m² daily and ara-C 7.5mg/m² daily by continuous infusion for upto 14 days. In their report, the CHR rate among 44 patients treatedwas 93%, and cytogenetic responses were observed in 16 (44%) of 36patients treated for at least 6 months. Their study group included 14patients in early chronic-phase CML: all 14 (100%) achieved CHR, and11 (84%) of 13 assessable patients had a major

cytogeneticresponse. It is not clear how much prior IFN α therapy thesepatients had received and whether they were clearly IFN α -resistantor had been entered onto the study because of unacceptableIFN α -related toxicities. The comparison of response rates withinsimilar patient subcategories would be of interest. Their studysuggested that even better CHR and cytogenetic response rates may be expected depending on patient selection (eg, IFN α toxic patients, early chronic-phase CML), as had also been observed in our previous study of HHT (six courses followed by IFN α maintenance) in earlychronic-phase CML.

An important question is the additional benefit of ara-Ccombined with HHT. Although we attempted to compare the twosequential studies at our institution (HHT alone in 73 patients withactive disease [21 of whom had clonal evolution] and the current study with HHT plus ara-C), the comparison and evaluation of the benefit from addition of ara-C was difficult because of differences in the study groups (Table 7), dose schedules, and follow-up times. HHT alone was used for 10 to 14 days during remission induction and for 7 days every month during maintenance therapy. Patients previously treated with HHT alone had been less heavily pretreated with IFN α and had not been exposed to either HHT or to ara-C. However, it seems that the HHT plus ara-C combination was not associated with an increased risk of known or unpredictable side effects and may have improved outcome in CML after accounting for known differences in prognostic factors within the two study groups. The possible beneficial effect of ara-C on survival may be mediated through suppression of clones responsible for disease transformation.

Two issues, if resolved, may expand the potential use ofHHT in hematologic and perhaps solid tumors: (1) the route-scheduledelivery, and (2) the mechanisms underlying the cardiovascular sideeffects with shorter infusion schedules. The continuous-infusionschedule, although effective against CML, is cumbersome and limits theinvestigation of even lower-dose longer-exposure schedules (eg, 0.5 to 1 mg/m 2 for 3 to 4 weeks). A safesubcutaneous schedule may allow reinvestigating HHT, not only in CML, but also as maintenance therapy in AML, as differentiation therapy inAPL, and as a chronic subcutaneous low-dose schedule in MDS. All ofthese are diseases in which HHT investigations had been discouragedbecause of the HHT toxicity profile, despite evidence ofefficacy. $^{17-20,37}$ Understanding the etiology of thecardiovascular problems may allow a targeted development of a newgeneration of HHT derivatives designed to avoid cardiovascular sideeffects and to expand the spectrum of antitumor activity (as has beenshown for deoxynucleoside cytidine analogs, eg, ara-C v gemcitabine). This will then rejuvenate anticancer research with HHT-like molecules.

HHT has shown activity in hematologic cancers other thanCML and AML that needs further exploration. Low-dose harringtonine wasreported to induce remissions in APL.³⁷ Ten patients with APL receivedharringtonine 1 to 3 mg over 4 to 5 hours daily until completeresponse; seven (70%) achieved complete response after a median of 71days and a median cumulative dose of 136 mg. HHT has already shown invitro effects on apoptosis and differentiation, ^{26,27,38} which mayprove helpful not only against APL but also against other cancerswhere maturation arrest is pathophysiologic, such as MDS. Among 15patients with MDS treated by Feldman et al, ¹⁹ four (27%) achieved objectiveresponses. Myelosuppressive complications were significant at the doseschedule used (5 mg/m² by continuousinfusion daily for 9 days), and a high mortality rate precludedfurther investigations with this schedule. ¹⁹ Lower dose schedules of HHT, as inCML, may prove effective and less toxic in theseconditions.

Recent studies have reported encouraging results with anew *BCR-ABL* tyrosine kinaseinhibitor, STI-571. Among patients treated in chronic-phase CML whohad experienced treatment failure with IFN α (because of resistanceor toxicity), the CHR rate was 100% when STI-571 was given at 300 mgor more orally

daily; cytogenetic responses were also observed. STI-571 was also beneficial in the treatment of accelerated-blastic phases of CML. 39,40 Future studies will better define the relative benefits of STI-571 and HHT plus ara-C, alone or incombinations, in patients who have been treated unsuccessfully with IFN α .

In summary, the combination of HHT and low-dose ara-C wassafe and effective in the dose schedule used in our study in patientswith late chronic-phase CML. This now offers such patients (ifIFN α treatment had failed) a good treatment option and indicatesthat further studies with IFN α in front-line CML therapy arewarranted.

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The present invention describes a new method of therapy, its use/application in human and animal diseases and disorders, particularly cancers, leukemias, lymphomas, parasite diseases and therapeutic resistance to other agent, by the subcutaneous mode of administration of a drug based upon harringtonines such as homoharringtonine or harringtonine their salt and tautomeric form eventually combined with one or more chemotherapeutic agents or inhibitor of resistance, using a specifically adapted formulation in which (i) the pH of the formulation or constituted solution for injection ranges between 5.5 and 8.5, (ii) the harringtonines are solution or hydrophilic freeze-dried powder ready-to-reconstitute of buffered salt of homoharringtonine or harringtonine and, (iii) the level of chromatographic purity of harringtonines suitable for pharmaceutical use is higher than 99.7%.

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Homoharringtonine: an effective new drug for remission induction in refractory nonlymphoblastic leukemia

RP Warrell Jr, CJ Coonley and TS Gee

Homoharringtonine (HHT) is a new plant alkaloid originally isolated in the People's Republic of China. Preliminary studies have suggested antitumor activity in several neoplastic diseases. We treated 49 patients with relapsed or resistant acute leukemia with

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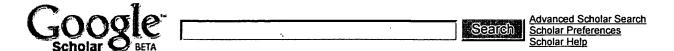
escalating doses of homoharringtonine administered by continuous infusion. Three dose levels were examined: 5 mg/m2 for seven days, 7 mg/m2 for seven days, and 5 mg/m2 for nine days. Of 28 patients with acute nonlymphoblastic leukemia who received cumulative doses of 45 to 49 mg/m2, seven patients (25%) achieved complete remission. Four of these remissions occurred in a subset of ten patients previously resistant to two or more induction attempts with conventional chemotherapy. There were no remissions in three patients with secondary leukemia or in seven patients with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. Reversible hypotension, fluid retention, diarrhea, and tumor lysis syndrome were the major toxic effects of this treatment. Our results indicate that homoharringtonine is an effective new drug for the treatment of acute nonlymphoblastic leukemia and that this drug does not share cross- resistance with conventional antileukemic agents. The recommended dose is 5 mg/m2/d administered by continuous infusion for nine days.

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